Case study: The Internews research unit

For the first time in an emergency, media development NGO, Internews, began funding a research unit from the earliest days of their response in Haiti. The research department began as a way of mapping and understanding the best tools to improve communication with affected communities, in order to strengthen their daily humanitarian news programme Enformasyon Nou Dwe Konnen – ENDK (Kreyol for ‘News You Can Use’).

The team established twice-monthly rolling audience assessments, which began in March 2010 and covered the earthquake-affected area. Since then, every two weeks, the team has returned to the same places to assess if and how information needs change. The team also undertook the monitoring and analysing of SMSs sent to ENDK (around 50 to 100 a day), helping to select those that could be addressed in the mailbox section of the programme. Since the start, the findings of the research team have been fed directly back into the radio programme, ensuring that the editorial agenda consistently mapped the information needs of the audience. They also carried out an assessment of the impact of the earthquake on local media outlets and their subsequent needs. The research team has also carried out a series of focus groups to track reaction to ENDK broadcasts, which have also served as central to their monitoring and evaluation strategy. Through this they were able to demonstrate the programme’s reach and impact. In February 2010, for example, a month after broadcasts began, 80 percent of participants were aware of ENDK. By July 2010, this had increased to 100 percent. Focus group participants were also asked to identify information heard through ENDK that they could integrate into their lives, such as how to secure a tent or how to use a mosquito net.

The Internews research was originally intended to be completely internal. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and other partners in Communications with Disaster Affected Communities (CDAC) Haiti, however, suggested that it might be of interest to the wider humanitarian community. In collaboration with CDAC Haiti, Internews began sharing their data with other players, including the Haitian authorities and local NGOs.

Many organisations and partnerships began using the research to guide development of their own information and communication work. These included HelpAge International and the Hygiene Promotion Sub Cluster. “People started coming to me...wanting the research,” says Internews Research Director, Jennifer Mandel. “Our distribution list is now over 100 people.” Those interested also included local media who were broadcasting ENDK and who saw the value of the research in attracting income. Radio 1, one of Haiti’s biggest stations (and – as the Internews research showed – the station on which most people listened to ENDK) approached Internews directly for the data, and were able to use it to leverage revenue from advertisers.
Internews also participated in other partnerships facilitated by CDAC Haiti to share knowledge and best practice around research, including training staff from other organisations\(^1\) to carry out focus groups. This was promoted as best practice and as an effective form of advocacy for better communication practices within agencies not specialising in communication. “There were organisations I believe who really took to heart what was coming out in the research and modified their communication strategies as a result – at least, that’s what they told me,” comments Jennifer Mandel. “I think HelpAge, for example, got the idea for using radio as a means for communication about the elderly through the research. For them, it was a light bulb moment. I have a ton of thank you notes from people saying that this is really useful and to keep it up.”

The Internews research team also played a key role in collaborative research. In particular they worked with the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) to implement a rapid survey of knowledge and attitudes towards cholera in November 2010. This was then used immediately to shape on-going communication work. When the survey revealed, for example, that more than 60 percent of those interviewed did not know the location of their nearest cholera treatment centre, UNOPS and other organisations began sending staff to the field to proactively share with communities locations and contact details of cholera treatment centres. A further and originally unanticipated impact of the research work is that Haiti now has 19 staff trained to a high standard in qualitative and quantitative audience research methodology and practice. Internews is supporting this team to develop into their own independent research firm to serve both the humanitarian community and Haiti’s media sector.\(^2\)

---

\(^1\) Such as the IOM, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the International Medical Corps (IMC).

\(^2\) Haitian media outlets are now starting to see the value of professional audience research in attracting advertising revenue.